

Testimony from Fred C. Ferguson, Vice President, Public Affairs and Communications, Vista Outdoor and Member, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable

United States House of Representatives Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Subcommittee Legislative Hearing

March 28, 2023

10:15 a.m. ET in room 1324 of the Longworth House Office Building

Good morning Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Fred Ferguson and I serve as Vice President of Public Affairs and Communications for Vista Outdoor and member-representative of the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable. I am grateful for the chance to voice support for the bipartisan bills under consideration today.

Vista Outdoor (NYSE: VSTO) is a leading manufacturer and designer of outdoor recreation gear. We are headquartered in Anoka, Minnesota, and employ more than 6,000 people across 16 states and Puerto Rico. We serve our consumers through a portfolio of 41 iconic brands, which include CamelBak, Simms Fishing, Fox Racing, QuietKat e-bikes, Bushnell and Federal.

We are a mission-driven company founded on the belief that when we do well, we can do good. This means we actively advocate for policies that expand recreational opportunities and directly fund organizations whose missions bring more people outside. The outdoors – and more specifically our federal lands and waters – are for all Americans and we believe that more people should experience the wonders of being in the wild.

This mindset drives our business actions: we've invested more than \$1 billion acquiring new outdoor companies. The Vista Outdoor Foundation has funded over a dozen outdoor organizations on the front lines of expanding access and conservation. We are one of the largest contributors to conservation through the Pittman-Robertson Act, with over \$500 million since our founding.

Much of our business success – combined with bipartisan outdoor policy wins led by this Committee – has contributed to the growth of the outdoor recreation economy. The latest Bureau of Economic Analysis research shows that the outdoor recreation economy represents 1.9% of GDP, 4.5 million jobs and \$862 billion in gross output. From 2020 to 2021, the outdoor recreation economy grew three times faster than the U.S. economy as a whole as Americans flocked outdoors during the pandemic. This translates into rural job creation and economic development and diversification for communities in and around federal lands and waters.

We appreciate the Subcommittee for holding today’s hearing. Despite outdoor recreation’s run of successes, the industry is not immune to the larger macroeconomic conditions we face today. Rampant inflation and rising interest rates are harming consumers who may not have the option to buy groceries or plan an adventure.

Long-term trends provided by the Outdoor Foundation also show declines in “core” participation and outdoor outings¹. National Park visitation shows that even during the post-pandemic boost, overall visitation to our parks remains below 2019 levels and off 2016 highs². And outdoor recreation companies have been harmed by federal trade policies, including the lapse of the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) and inconsistent 301 tariff policy.

Vista Outdoor and the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable support each of the bills under consideration today. The current climate and long-term outlook make today’s bipartisan hearing essential, and we urge the Subcommittee to move with speed and conviction to enact these bills.

More specifically, we support the **FILM Act**. We need to recruit and activate the next generation of outdoor recreation champions, and The FILM Act will help us reach and inspire these future visitors, leaders and champions.

¹ <https://www.bicycleretailer.com/announcements/2022/09/22/outdoor-participation-grows-record-levels#.ZB2gky-B1MA>

² <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/visitation-numbers.htm>

We support the **SOAR Act**. This legislation fundamentally improves the way people access and experience the outdoors – and we thank the bipartisan leaders who have gotten us to this point. We appreciate the bill’s intent to create parity withing permitting, and we want to ensure that includes guided bike trips. The new normal for guided bike trips includes a mix of traditional and e-bike users – and final SOAR Act language should ensure that traditional bikes and e-bikes operate under a single permit where e-bikes are allowed on public lands.

We support the **BOLT Act**. Long-distance bike trails are one of the fastest growing segments of gravel riding, and this bill will attract more users to their federal lands.

We support the **Range Access Act**. Recreational shooting and hunting have grown in popularity as shooting sports participants have become more diverse and active. Expanding range infrastructure will promote safety, minimize dispersed target shooting and support wildlife conservation funding, as target shooting is the leading contributor to the Pittman-Robertson trust fund.

Vista Outdoor supports the **SHRED Act**, legislation that would enable greater investments at U.S. Forest Service permitted ski areas.

Vista Outdoor is a proud supporter of the Veterans in Parks Act law, which was championed by this Subcommittee. We are equally supportive of the **Law Enforcement Officer and Firefighter Recreation Pass Act** and look forward to it becoming law.

Again, on behalf of Vista Outdoor and the many stakeholders of the \$862 billion outdoor recreation industry, thank you for the opportunity to testify and for the Subcommittee’s focus on enacting an outdoor recreation package this Congress.

I would be happy to answer any questions.

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